

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

NEWPORT, RI

**Caribbean Mass Migration Operations:**  
**MOOTW with the US Coast Guard in the Lead**

by

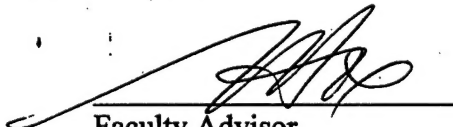
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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval war College or the Department of the Navy.

  
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## **Abstract**

When our nation's security is threatened by uncontrolled migrations of large numbers of people into the US via the sea, the Coast Guard is the agency principally charged with countering the threat, and receives assistance from Navy and other DoD resources when necessary. Joint and Navy Doctrine do not provide adequate guidance to planners by failing to address Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations (AMIO) as a Military Operation Other Than War (MOOTW) and by neglecting the US Coast Guard's de facto role as a full fledged player in the MOOTW joint arena. Until the doctrine is updated and revised, staffs charged with planning for a Caribbean mass migration need to pay special attention to the Coast Guard's lead role and to the details of the Coast Guard - Navy interface at the operational and tactical level.

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## **Introduction**

Uncontrolled migration from nations in the Caribbean region into the United States has been and continues to be a threat to our national security. The United States Coast Guard is the federal agency primarily responsible for countering this threat at sea. When migrant numbers reach the crisis level, i.e., a mass migration emergency, US Navy ships and other assets from the Department of Defense support the Coast Guard in the migrant interdiction role. What ensues amounts to Coast Guard led Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). While operations of this nature have worked well and have met the nation's objectives during several recent migration emergencies, the ad-hoc nature of the Coast Guard - DoD interface leads to inefficiencies and leaves room for improvement in planning future operations.

This paper examines the MOOTW mission of Coast Guard led Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations (AMIO) with the objective of assisting the operational commander or force provider in planning for the next Caribbean migration emergency. After a short review of the background of the mission, the appropriateness of the Coast Guard lead role in AMIO is examined. Then, applicable doctrine is evaluated for sufficiency and used as a template to review current operational plans and recent practice. Lessons learned from Operations Able Vigil, Sea Signal and others are considered along with the doctrine to identify possible shortfalls in the doctrine or plans and recommendations are offered for improvements and for areas where planners need to compensate for insufficient guidance.

It should be noted that this paper is focused on the at-sea migrant interdiction phase of AMIO operations. The geographic CINC is typically tasked with a much broader range of migrant responsibilities including camp operations and migrant

processing ashore. Those functions, while important, are beyond the scope of this paper and are not addressed.

### **The Migration Threat**

The United States has been a migration destination since colonial times. US policy towards migrants<sup>1</sup> has changed with the political situation over the years and is currently a mixed bag, with immigration limited in both number and countries of origin. Demand for permission to immigrate to the US continues to far out strip availability, and will likely increase in the future. Unauthorized, or "illegal" migrants routinely attempt to cross our borders, largely motivated by economic reasons. Uncontrolled migration threatens American society and is a national security issue.

In raw numbers, the U.S. - Mexico border offers the greatest threat of illegal immigration, but the maritime route through the Caribbean into the South East US is also significant. Throughout the Caribbean region, there are many countries which serve as potential sources of US bound migrants, with the greatest threat for the foreseeable future coming from three of the closest island nations: Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.<sup>2</sup> Migrant numbers originating from these three countries have risen and fallen over recent decades as conditions and policies have changed, but the potential for large numbers of migrants remains unabated. There are literally millions of people not far off our shores who, if unrestrained, would relocate to the US.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms migrant and refugee, often used indiscriminately, have specific legal connotations which are important in the political arena. In an operational context it is Coast Guard practice to use the term migrant unless the individual's legal status as a refugee has been determined by competent authority.

<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Kohout and others, Looking Out to 2020: Trends Relevant to the Coast Guard (Alexandria, Va: Center for Naval Analyses, May 1997), 14-24.

### **US Efforts to Counter the Threat**

Galvanized by the Mariel boatlift of 1980 when 125,000 Cuban Migrants landed in South Florida, it has since been US policy to interdict migrants offshore and (with certain exceptions) either return them to their country of origin or deliver them to an offshore processing facility such as the Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba. As migrants often attempt their journey in unsafe and unseaworthy craft, interdiction operations typically encompass aspects of both maritime law enforcement (MLE) and search and rescue (SAR). Logically then, the US Coast Guard, with an existing presence in the Caribbean and expertise in both MLE and SAR, was charged with primary responsibility for maritime AMIO.

While force levels have varied with the threat, there have been Coast Guard surface assets dedicated to the AMIO mission in the Caribbean non-stop since the early 1980's. Coast Guard forces have proven adequate to meet "routine" AMIO mission demands, but when migrant numbers have risen beyond the capacity of the available Coast Guard Cutters, US Navy surface ships have provided a vital surge capacity to the effort.<sup>3</sup> This happened several times in the 1990's, with the most recent (and largest allocation of forces) being 1994's Operation Able Vigil which peaked at a force level of 41 Coast Guard cutters and 17 US Navy ships, and resulted in the interdiction of over 35,000 Cubans trying to cross the Straits of Florida.<sup>4</sup>

All in all, since 1990 alone the Coast Guard (with Navy backup during peak periods) successfully interdicted some 73,000+ migrants at sea, the vast majority of

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<sup>3</sup> The exact point where DoD assistance is needed will necessarily vary, but current plans use a lower threshold of 3000 migrants per week as a planning factor.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Larzelere, "Will the Coast Guard's New Efficiencies Enable it to Counter Horrendous Budget Cuts?" Almanac of Sea Power, January 1995: 22-29.

which originated in the Caribbean.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that just last year the responsibility for planning for DoD Caribbean mass migration response shifted from the US Atlantic Command (USACOM) which had supported previous AMIO operations to the US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) with shift of responsibilities for the Caribbean region.<sup>6</sup>

### **Should the Coast Guard Run the Next Mass Migration Operation?**

A warfighting CINC preparing for a national security emergency in his area of responsibility might reasonably ask why the US Coast Guard (and not the CINC himself) should be the supported commander in a migration emergency response. In fact the "new to the AOR" USSOUTHCOM staff asked exactly that question in early 1997 when planning their first exercise involving a Caribbean mass migration.<sup>7</sup> The answer to the question is both a matter of policy and a matter of what makes sense. The Coast Guard, designated by Executive Order as the lead agency for maritime AMIO<sup>8</sup>, prosecutes the mission on a daily basis and by doing so maintains an important level of expertise. It would not make sense to displace the "task familiar" Coast Guard command structure at the onset of a crisis with a Joint Task Force (JTF) sure to have less familiarity at least in the crucial opening days, unless that JTF could bring some capability to the table that the Coast Guard couldn't. Experience has shown the Coast Guard to be a fully capable

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<sup>5</sup> Kohout and others, 14-24.

<sup>6</sup> The Commander, Seventh Coast Guard District (CCGD7), Miami, remains the Coast Guard operational commander responsible for the Caribbean AOR.

<sup>7</sup> LCDR G. A. Cruthis, USCG, TRIP REPORT: BLUE ADVANCE 97, Memo to CCGD7, 3500, 26 Feb 97.

<sup>8</sup> The Office of the President, Executive order 12807 (Washington, DC.: 24 May 1992)



operational commander for this particular scenario with a shift to a DoD Joint Force Commander offering no significant advantage.

The CINC (through a JTF) will also likely be tasked in the case of a mass migration with the daunting mission of establishing and operating migrant camps or processing facilities. That mission alone has proven to be quite enough to fill the CINCs plate without also having to control an at-sea interdiction operation which can competently be handled by someone else. The Coast Guard is therefore the operationally correct choice to retain control of interdiction efforts even if significant DoD assets are provided in support.

### **Is the Coast Guard a Joint Player?**

While the Coast Guard has been a de facto joint player during recent mass migration operations, it becomes evident upon a review of joint doctrine that the Coast Guard occupies as "in between" status, somewhere between a full fledged military service and an "Other Government Agency". Most of the doctrinal references to the Coast Guard are in the context of a Joint Force cooperating with other agencies, and not with a participating equal or leader.

Joint Pub 5-00.2, Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures, released in 1991, addresses the Coast Guard's potential joint contributions only in that; "When directed by the President, the Coast Guard will function as a part of the Navy and may have forces assigned or attached to a JTF"<sup>9</sup>. Even the definition of Joint excludes the Department of Transportation based service: "Joint: Connotes activities, operations, organizations, etc., in which elements of two or more *Military* Departments participate."

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<sup>9</sup> Joint Pub 5-00.2, Joint Task Force Planning Guidance and Procedures (Washington D. C.: September 1991) 8.

(emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> The only thorough treatment of Coast Guard missions and capabilities in is Joint Pub 3-08, *Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations* where the Coast Guard (along with such notables as the Federal Highway Administration) is listed in the context of being "an operating agency" of the Department of Transportation.<sup>11</sup> There is, of course, no mention in this context of the Coast Guard participation as a service component in any Joint Force.

In the post cold war period, the Coast Guard has seen a marked increase in recognition of its value as an instrument of national security in its own right, and not just as an auxiliary to the Navy. Joint Doctrine remains very much a work in progress, and by 1995, while still only mentioned as a footnote to a table of possible Joint Task Force components, Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations, at least elevated the Coast Guard's status to; "There may also be a Coast Guard component in a joint force."<sup>12</sup> Beginning in the summer of 1995, the Coast Guard seal was even added to the cover of Joint Pubs.

From a purely parochial perspective, the trend is in the right direction. Objectively, doctrine is evolving to reflect real life. The Coast Guard's visibility and credibility in the joint arena were greatly enhanced by the service's performance in a number of joint operations in the 1990's, including not only mass migration operations, but also the 1994 intervention into Haiti, Operation Uphold Democracy. The next Caribbean mass migration will be a Coast Guard led operation, significant in terms of national objectives as well as level of resources employed. Joint doctrine just needs to catch up, and should be revised at the next opportunity to clearly reflect this the Coast

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<sup>10</sup> Joint Pub 0-2, Unified Action Armed forces (UNAAF) (Washington D.C.: 24 February 1995) GL-2.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Pub 3-08, Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations, Vol II (Washington D.C.: x, 9 October 1996) A-G-1 to A-G-4.

<sup>12</sup> Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Washington D.C.: 1 February 1995) 46.

Guard's de facto role as a bonefide service component, valuable to a Joint Force Commander in AMIO and other MOOTW scenarios. In the interim, planners should not be misled by the current doctrine's omissions.

### **The AMIO Doctrine Gap**

In an ideal world, staffs planning for the next Caribbean mass migration would have doctrine, both joint and service, which addressed not only the Coast Guard's role, but also the AMIO mission at the strategic, operational and tactical. Unfortunately, the AMIO mission per se is entirely missing from both Joint and Navy doctrine, and what Coast Guard doctrine exists is neither widely available to DoD personnel nor in a form that fully meets their needs.

This gap in doctrine is illustrated by Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, which is silent regarding the AMIO mission despite the fact that it clearly qualifies as MOOTW.<sup>13</sup> While it is true that the pub does not portend to be all inclusive in terms of possible MOOTW missions, the failure to even address AMIO is surprising. AMIO falls somewhere between the recognized missions of Humanitarian Assistance and Maritime Interception Operations, but has enough unique elements to warrant recognition as a separate mission area.

There is also no currently effective Navy service level doctrine which covers AMIO. There are, however, two Naval Warfare pubs in development which should fill the gap when promulgated: NWP 3-07, Military Operations Other Than War, and NWP 3-07.4, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Counter drug and Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations.<sup>14</sup> Given that AMIO is exclusively a maritime mission and

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<sup>13</sup> Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Military Operations Other Than War (Washington D.C.: 16 June 1995) Chapter III.

<sup>14</sup> CDR Jim Howe, USCG, US Naval Doctrine Command, Norfolk VA, telephone conversation with the author, 1 May 1998.

typically conducted at the service, vice joint force level, once published, these Naval Warfare Pubs may well prove sufficient for planning in lieu of Joint Doctrine on the subject.

The Coast Guard addresses the AMIO mission in its Maritime Law Enforcement Manual (COMDTINST 16247.1), sufficiently to meet it's own service needs, but the treatment of the subject assumes a background familiarity which DoD participants will not likely have. As a result, while this Coast Guard "doctrine" would prove to be a valuable reference, it alone would not meet the needs of those in the DoD side of the house. The Coast Guard should, and is cooperating in the development of the new Naval Warfare Pubs mentioned previously.

Until adequate AMIO specific doctrine becomes available, operational level planners and potential mission executors would do well to recognize this lack of institutionalized corporate knowledge and compensate by seeking pertinent information through informal channels. It would be a mistake to assume that AMIO doctrine was unnecessary just because it was unavailable. Applying the Joint Doctrine's general principles of MOOTW to operational level AMIO provides a good framework to assist planners in identifying areas where extra attention is necessary. This methodology is explored after a brief review of existing mass migration plans.

### **The Plan for the Next Mass Migration**

The current plan for the at-sea interdiction part of the next Caribbean mass migration operation is found in the Coast Guard's CCGDSEVEN OPLAN 9707-95, which is the equivalent of a DoD full OPLAN with TPPFD. USCINCSO FUNCPLAN 6120-97 covers the DoD's participation and as a Functional Plan (FUNCPLAN), is less

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detailed that its Coast Guard counterpart. Under these plans, the Coast Guard's Seventh District Commander (CCGDSEVEN) would be the supported commander and USSOUTHCOM would be supporting.

The two plans mesh well and describe an operation that retains the concept and much of the detail from the highly successful Operation Able Vigil of August-September 1994. An offshore barrier patrol of Coast Guard and Navy surface vessels under the tactical control of an embarked Coast Guard Commander interdicts migrants in international waters near the point of origin. Migrants are then transferred to other Navy vessels for repatriation or transport to a designated processing facility.

The Coast Guard plan provides the only specifics regarding the at-sea interdiction operation, while the USSOUTHCOM plan primarily addresses the establishment and operation of a migrant processing and holding facility ashore. The plans agree that USSOUTHCOM will provide forces to operate under Coast Guard TACON for AMIO, but neither gives much detail regarding employment of Navy ships under Coast Guard control. Lessons learned from previous mass migration operations indicate that the Coast Guard - Navy interface issues have proven initially problematic and should be addressed in greater detail during planning. Specific issues warranting closer scrutiny are identified in the following doctrinal review.

### **The General Principles of MOOTW**

As previously noted, the AMIO mission is not specifically addressed in joint doctrine, but the general principles of MOOTW, Security, Legitimacy, Unity of effort, Restraint, Perseverance and Objective (SLURPO) do provide a useful starting point for operational level planning.<sup>15</sup> The following is the result of a review of the current plans

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<sup>15</sup> Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Military Operations Other Than War (Washington D.C.: 16 June 1995) Chapter II.

using the MOOTW general principles as a template. Applicable real world lessons learned were also considered. The plans are substantially in compliance with the principles, and the points made below are only those where additional attention from the staffs appears to be appropriate.

The **Security** of the forces involved in AMIO is adequately addressed in both plans, as is the security of the interdicted migrants. The only area for suggested improvement is in regard to the application of Coast Guard use of force policy to DoD forces while under Coast Guard TACON. Some Navy crews are familiar with the Coast Guard's use of force policy from participation in counter drug operations, but it is unreasonable to assume that all Navy personnel detailed to a crisis response would have that experience or expertise. Incorporation of Coast Guard use of force policy into the CJCS Standing Rules of Engagement (SROE) is under consideration and would provide a long term solution to this issue, but in the mean time, "Just in time" training on the Coast Guard policy should be considered mandatory for all ships assigned to AMIO.

The **Legitimacy** of AMIO operations is generally not a problem due to the humanitarian aspect normally associated with "rescuing" migrants from the perils of the sea. The exception is cases where migrants are repatriated directly to the country of origin and poor conditions in that country influence domestic or international public opinion against the operation. This has happened in the past to some degree with the return of migrants to Haiti and Cuba. The decision on the disposition of the migrants once interdicted is made at higher levels and is beyond the operational planner's ability to either control or predict. Planners do however need to recognize the potential for detrimental effects on the morale and motivation of ship's crews tasked with returning migrants to a bad situation and consider options to address this potentiality.

**Unity of Effort** is an important concept for large scale maritime AMIO operations, and is not adequately assured by the plans currently in effect. Both the CINC and Coast Guard plans fail to address the employment of Navy assets in sufficient detail. In effect the CINC says "we'll send 'em" and the Coast Guard says "we'll take 'em", but neither says much more.

Lessons learned from several previous operations reveal a consistent theme that Navy combatants arrived needing more detailed information and training to be immediately effective. The specifics of the AMIO mission and the Coast Guard C<sup>2</sup> lash up are frequently mentioned. Things as simple as Coast Guard terminology, migrant transfer procedures, reports and communication plans have caused concern in the past.

One lesson learned, reflective of many, recommended a prearrival training package covering:

"...boat crew training, migrant receiving walk through, migrant security exercises, OPREP 3 preparation drills, ... task group training in Search And Rescue (SAR) operations."<sup>16</sup>

Another Navy Commanding Officer succinctly put it:

"We were playing it by ear for the first few days since the OPTASK/OPGENS were received late in the game. During this time, initial confusion resulted over the definition and role of "SAC"<sup>17</sup> as we do not speak the same language between the sea services"<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "OPTASKS/OPGENS for migrant operations were received late." Lessons learned No. LLEA0-04664, 10 January 1995. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned System (JULLS). Available on Navy Tactical Information Compendium (NTIC) CD-ROM Series. Washington, DC: Naval Tactical Support Activity, January 1998.

<sup>17</sup> "Search Area Commander" in Coast Guard usage.

<sup>18</sup> "AMIO Mission Requirements Unfamiliar to Navy Ship Crews." Lessons Learned No. LLEA0-03415, 26 March 1993. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned System (JULLS). Available on Navy Tactical Information Compendium (NTIC) CD-ROM Series. Washington, DC: Naval Tactical Support Activity, January 1998.

Other lessons learned revealed a steep learning curve for Navy and Coast Guard participants alike regarding the safest and most efficient use of different Navy ship types in migrant ops. Specific topics where lessons have been learned the hard way include the maximum number of migrants each class of ship can safely accommodate, techniques for rigging migrant shelters, messing and head facilities on deck, the pros and cons of embarkation methods ( ship's boat, embarkation ladder, etc.) and even which classes of ships are and are not suitable for long distance migrant transport. Some of the detailed information of this type is recorded in the Joint Universal Lessons Learned System (JULLS), but much resided only in the perishable memories of the participants. It has not been reviewed in detail or made readily available to planners.

It is unrealistic to expect AMIO contingency plans to be sufficiently thorough to address every detail, as many things will necessarily be ad hoc in a crisis operation. There is, however, great room for improvement in capturing and making available as many details pertinent to the Coast Guard Navy interface as possible.

Perhaps NWP 3-07.4, , Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Counter drug and Alien Migrant Interdiction , once published, will fill the gap. The Coast Guard could also aid the process by providing some of the operational and tactical details worked out during previous mass migrations in an appropriate, Navy standard form such as an OPTASK. In the interim, planners need to provide for some sort of bootstrap training or other method of "ramping up" inbound Navy units. Temporarily assigning a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) or liaison officer to each Navy Combatant would fit the bill nicely.

It is particularly important to consider the principle of **Restraint** when developing rules of Engagement (ROE) for AMIO operations. Depending on the political situation, migrants have been known to resist interdiction by initially refusing to stop, and/or violently resist control once aboard. Legitimacy is at risk if excessive or inappropriate



force is used against migrants, much more so than in strict law enforcement situations. As previously mentioned, the Coast Guard Use of Force Policy is invoked by the current plans and adequately addresses AMIO peculiarities. The only recommendation is that steps be taken to ensure that involved DoD personnel, which might include USMC security detachments aboard ships, are properly trained prior to arrival.

**Perseverance** has been a problem in past mass migration operations because of the short to no notice nature of the assignment of assets and the need to quickly stand up a robust logistics infrastructure. The AMIO mission demands significant quantities of mission specific resources, AMIO supplies, over and above normal sustainment items and ships conducting the interdiction mission need to be resupplied concurrent with delivery of migrants to the processing site.

The Coast Guard and CINC plan both adequately address logistics, but neither envisions support to the other. Both plans call for establishing a logistics infrastructure at the migrant processing site, nominally GTMO. The JTF logistics infrastructure called for in the plan might well be able to also provide the interdiction assets with common use AMIO consumables, increasing efficiency and reducing duplication of effort. Planners should investigate this opportunity.

The final MOOTW principle, **Objective**, is adequately covered in the current plans. It is clear that the mission is to interdict migrants attempting to illegally enter the United States and deliver them safely to a designated processing point. Safety of life at sea is paramount. Of all MOOTW missions, AMIO is one where the objective is easiest to discern.

### **Conclusion**

A Caribbean mass migration remains a threat to our national security and the U.S. Coast Guard is the appropriate agency to lead the interdiction effort with DoD support. Joint and service doctrine are inadequate for mission planning, and need to be revised to reflect both the AMIO MOOTW mission and the Coast Guard's de facto equality in the joint arena.

The plans currently in effect are by and large satisfactory, but a number of topics need to be addressed in greater detail for the smooth integration of Navy ships into the Coast Guard interdiction effort. Responsible staffs should prepare just-in-time training packages, canned OPTASKS, or other appropriate medium to address the host of issues specific to the AMIO mission and the Coast Guard - Navy interface. There are new Naval Warfare Pubs currently in development which should go a long way toward filling the AMIO doctrine gap, but in the mean time it is up to the planners and operators to be innovative in preparing for the next Caribbean mass migration.

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